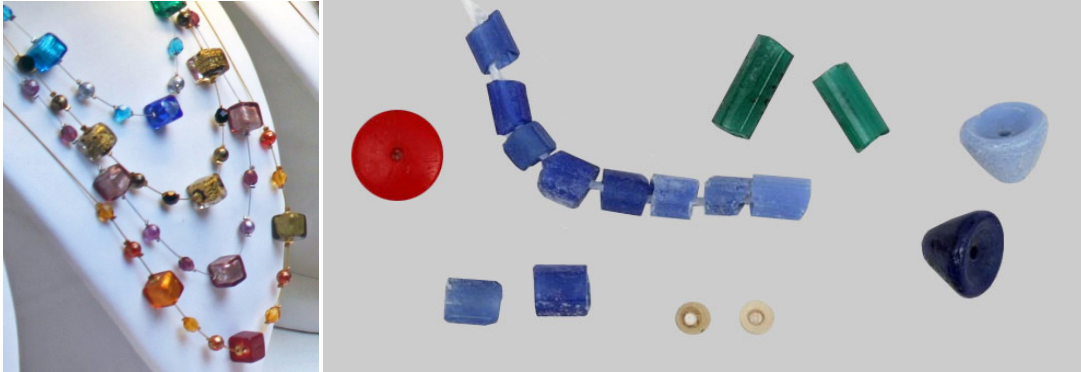


The Traveling Beads



What does this colorful 21st century Venetian glass necklace have in common with glass beads found by archeologists at Manzanar? A close look reveals that all the found beads were made of the same material, of similar color and shape, served the same functions, and originated from the same part of the world. How could beads from southern Europe appear thousands of miles away in the sand at Manzanar amongst American Indian artifacts? What do they reveal about the Owens Valley Paiute (Numu) who inhabited Manzanar long before it was a WWII War Relocation Center?

For centuries, Europeans have created beautiful glass objects that have served as beads, jewelry, money, vases, lamps and art objects. As early as 1291, there is evidence that artisans working in the glass factories of Italy have molded some of the most beautiful glass products in the world. When European explorers from Spain, Portugal, Italy and France began their land explorations in the New World, they brought these beautiful objects with them to trade with the people they hoped to find in the new land.

Archeologists have documented many American Indian sites in all parts of California that contain glass objects and beads of European origin. Trade networks existed throughout the country along river ways and trails allowing indigenous people to exchange resources (or goods) including manufactured items, such as beads. Regional exchanges must have occurred between the Spaniards and the Indians as the missions were built along the west coast of California. The establishment of the mission system was most likely responsible for the mass distribution of glass beads throughout California. Research reveals, the Owens Valley Paiute

"focused their attention across the towering Sierra Nevada, making trips in summer and fall when the mountain passes were free of snow. The closest trans-sierra trade routes to the George Creek and Manzanar area are Kearsarge Pass, west of Independence, and Cottonwood Pass, west of Lone Pine. "

This explains how beautiful blue, red, and green-colored glass molded in Europe could cross hundreds of miles of treacherous terrain from the missions in the coastal regions of California through the Sierra Nevada and into the hands of the American Indians living on land that would one day become Manzanar. Historical archives document the lives and trading routes of the American Indians living in the Owens Valle:

"The Owens Valley Paiute traded salt, pinyon pine nuts, seeds, obsidian, sinew-backed bows, rabbit skin blankets, deerskins, moccasins, mountain sheep skins, fox skin leggings, balls of tobacco, baskets, basketry water bottles waterproofed with pitch, wooden hot rock lifters, and

red and white paint pigments. In exchange they received shell money (disc beads, tubular clam beads, and more recently glass beads), acorns and acorn meal, finely-constructed Yokut baskets, cane for arrow shafts, and manzanita berries (J. Davis 1961; Steward 1933). "

The traded glass beads were the same ones produced in glass factories in Italy and other parts of Europe and distributed to various American Indian groups by Euro American explorers, trappers and fur traders. These beads were used as money; these "functional" trade beads varied in value by color, size and/or general look. The same beads when woven into clothing and other items served ceremonial and ornamental purposes. Thus, the Paiute used the glass beads in much the same way as the Europeans did and continue to use today. Beads became a medium of exchange, jewelry, ceremonial objects and ornamentation for their clothing. These beads symbolize shared values between two cultures living on opposite sides of the world.